

THOUGHTS WHILE SLEEPING AT MY MACHINE

By Ray Bradbury

Sometimes, in the late afternoon, when the weather gets close in my three bicycle and two typewriter garage (I make my wife keep her Ford Kindertoter in front of the house) my head often sinks until it taps gently against the platen of my Olympia. What follows can only be—Olympian thought!

Lolling there, surrounded by nine huge old trunks from which, if you can believe other writers, I have filched all the stories I've published in the last 18 years, I dream I am half-Zanuck, half-Warner, Sam Goldwyn, Sam Katzman—there are *no* limits to my drunken sense of power. Drowsily I begin talking to myself:

"Allright, mister," I say. "Now you're a studio head, make a picture! Go on! What's your schedule for the year? If it's so easy to make films that will lure the Serutan Set back into theatres, make some!"

"Okay, okay!" I say, nervously. "Let me gird my loins . . ." I reach into my lower desk drawer and take forth a Hershey's Almond bar and proceed to raise my blood sugar to manic heights. "First, who ever owns the rights to 'Wind, Sand, and Stars', by Antoine St. Exupery, I'd buy it and make it into the finest film on man's passion for flying ever made!"

"That's a good impractical beginning," snarls my more businesslike self, who plays only the gumball machines in Las Vegas. "Go on, idealist."

"Then," says Bradbury, the dreamer, "I'd film all the Hotel Splendide stories by Ludwig Bemelmans. Everybody's crying for humor, aren't they? Well, there sits Bemelmans, neglected. Connect the stories up (it *could* be done) and you'd have one of the great movies!"

My more businesslike self is silent. I hurry on, triumphant. "I'd put Thomas Wolfe on the screen."

"Impossible!"

"No, not if you love his work, in the right way. The film would have to be a poem or it would be nothing. It would have to start with a train and end with a train, the night, sleeping people, flashing towns, cities, oceans, the continental wilderness, all that. Remember, Wolfe helped invent the wide-screen! It would take about two years of real script-writing by one screenwriter, not four or six or 10, but one writer who really gave a damn about old Tom with all his flaws and all his foibles. But it could be done and it would have to be beautiful."

"Go on. You're in over your head. Swim."

"Then I'd make Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World'."

"Good Lord, you *are* out of your mind."

"I think RKO owns that book," I muse. "I wonder what Desilu's planning to do with it? Well, then, some day I'd make 'Tortilla Flat'—"

"It's been done!"

"It's never been done," I say. "And I'd make 'Grapes of Wrath'."

"It's been done!"

"No," I say quietly. "It hasn't been touched. And I'd make 'Jekyll and Hyde,' which hasn't been done, either, no matter what you say, since Fredric March made it in the early '30's. I'd do all of Jules Verne I could lay my hands on. I'd do Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories about Mars. They're full of

color, adventure and romance. I'd do H. Rider Haggard's 'She' again. I'd re-examine all of Haggard, come to think of it, and all of Robert Louis Stevenson, to see what's been missed. I'd make 'Tarzan'—"

"There've been six dozen Tarzan films!"

"I'd do 'Tarzan,'" I say. "And do it right for the first time. Nobody's ever touched him, silly as he is, wonderful as he can be. I'd do one film about zeppelins, one about balloons, and the men who dreamt and built them. I'd do a film on archeologists that really caught the excitement, the mystery, and the danger of searching for Tutankhamen's Tomb. Good God, there are a thousand exciting ideas, events in history, occupations, that have never been touched or tried, no one has ever bothered! I'd love to film Saroyan's 'My Name Is Aram,' the Stories of Stephen Leacock, the novels of Thomas Love Peacock, the stories of Robert Benchley and James Thurber! All books of great high humor and zest, brimming with life and free gifts for everyone! Impossible? No, sir! Benchley was the plot of his books, Thurber is the plot of his, as is Saroyan. Find a way to put those characters on screen, give them a single goal, and you can integrate the stories within that frame. Again, why hasn't someone taken a year off to do it?"

"Go on ruining the company," said my alter-ego.

"Allright, here goes. I'd make one three hour film about General Grant and one three hour film on General Lee and play them on alternate nights, North and South. Or I'd make *one* six hour film with two endings. Every other night, the South would win!"

"Let's change the subject to submarines."

"Fair enough! What are submarines all about? The men who build and run them? Not the old tired bull of up-periscope, but the exciting thing about undersea life and the reasons men go there? Untouched. Rocket ships? Untouched, too."

"At last count, ten thousand science-fiction films have been made."

"But not *one* that asked what's it all about? Why space-travel, why all the get-up-and-go? Not one major screenplay by one major writer based on an honest and compelling story with a major cast, major director and a decent budget. Last time it was done was 1936, England, 'Things To Come.' Nearest thing recently was also English, 'Breaking The Sound Barrier,' which nudged toward outer space. Our best s-f film so far was 'The Day the Earth Stood Still,' which had to do with space-travel in reverse, and didn't touch on what *we ourselves* will be doing in the next 30 years. One of two major issues of our time, space-travel, begging for someone to put it on screen and everyone walking away. We haven't learned a damn thing from Sputnik!"

"Sit down," says my alter-ego. "Your face is flushed."

"You know what I would do if I really wanted to make some fine films tomorrow morning?" I say. "I wouldn't have to make a list of my own. I'd call in the best screenwriters in town, and a few novelists and playwrights, too, and I'd say, 'If *you* were a producer with carte-blanche, what old love of yours would you like to see on the screen? What play? What book? What story would you fight to see done?' I'd get a

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list worth thinking about and worth doing, because, as the old, old saying goes, no man is dishonest in his loves. You must be patient enough to look for and find the man who loves Huxley to write Huxley for the screen and a man who is wild for Wolfe to write Wolfe! They'd make mistakes, yes, but not the kind of mistakes made when you dandle a property in front of a writer whose swimming pool has run dry and say, 'Do you love this' and he says, 'Yes!' before he knows if it's a Kafka or a 'kasha'! Love, love, love, friend, makes the world go round and could make exciting motion pictures again. Let a silly man rush in my office and cry, 'I must make Bergen Evans' *Natural History of Nonsense* into a comedy! and I'd like to think I might take time to study his face for fevers, check his pulse, and put him to work. We need more wild men, dynamiters, bridge-jumpers, balloon-piercers, barnstormers, Thorne Smith addicts, Sean O'Casey and Bernard Shaw friends, men who ride avalanches when they tire of horses, and climb volcano rims to light their cigar. Mike Todd was one. But, on the other hand, why have we let Walt Disney have all the fun, alone, for years, of making boys' books that get the men back in the theatres and men's books that one way or another the boys hear about? The women? They have to go out with the men or stay home and look at all those arm-pits on tv!"

I paused for breath and hurried on.

"Let's consider the Renaissance! Did you know that Titian died at 99 or 100, still fecund as a goat? What about a film on Michelangelo, the Medicis, the Borgias? And don't tell me there's no excitement there as well as idea! Why are we so afraid of quality of idea, incidentally? Strangely enough, some of the most intellectually stimulating are also the most adventurous choices we could catch on film. Michelangelo was always trying to figure some way of cramming his boy David in a suitcase; the Popes were either running him in or chasing him out of Rome with paid assassins. Why not a Hitchcock chase through the Uffizi or Pitti Galleries? Enter winded hero, who pausing to pant by a 40-foot nude cries, 'What's that?' 'Tintoretto,' says the drowsy attendant. 'And that?' 'Capaccio!' Exit hero, sprinting. Enter Papal Guard: 'Which way did he go?' 'Through the Fra Angelicos!' says the attendant. 'Take the shortcut through the Bellinis and head him off at the Giotto!'"

And away they rush like feather dusters.

"I'm getting in the spirit," says my alter-ego. "How about a film on Galileo? Isn't there a picture in the fine essays of Loren Eiseley? His book, 'The Immense Journey,' is the life of an anthropologist, and sounds bone-dry, doesn't it? But he brims with wonder and delight, with joy in discovery and with the fitting together of this great jigsaw of life on a crazy world."

"Now you're with it," I say.

"Why not a new 'Oz' film every five years?"

"A new Sherlock Holmes film, a really fine one, every 24 months!"

"Has anyone bought Albert Camus' 'The Plague,' a thoughtful, dramatic, terrifying adventure that would please groundlings as well as intellectuals?"

"For comedy, why not Bruce Marshall's 'Father Malachy's Miracle?' or Honor Tracy's 'The Straight and Narrow Path?' Or Balzac's 'Droll Stories'? Horrors, the Church, you cry. Well, yes, horrors, the Church! Let's fight a few Irish rounds there, to see what happens!"

"Have you ever watched teenage girls play basketball? There is that sublimely exasperating moment when the opposition is about to make a basket and all the girls jump up

and down, wave their hands and tell each other, 'Oh, dear! someone stop her!' That's pretty much the way I've seen Hollywood for some years now. Television glides in, scores. Disney darts past with a nice overhand throw. The British dribble up unopposed and show us how to make a decent comedy or a horror film. And all the while the girls stomp around tearing their hair and weeping. You'll pardon me if I blow the whistle and ask for a moment of ashamed silence."

"Enough! To work!"

I pulled my head up from the platen of my typewriter and broke the Olympian chain.

And there I was, just another writer, alone, with grand dreams.

Wouldn't it be great, I thought, wouldn't it be beautiful, if all the major studios went into the oil-business and left films to us, those who love it, those who really care?

With any luck at all, I prayed, putting new paper in my machine, uranium may be discovered at Gower and Sunset tomorrow. Then, if that mortuary just over the wall buys up Desilu and Paramount and starts re-forestation, Napoleon and I are in-like-Flynn!

How Are You Fixed?

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dollar write-offs for corporations with friends on The Hill, tender handling of cases involving campaign donors to both major parties and the unfair "flush-year" income-beating taken by irregularly employed professionals) is his often expressed "contempt of Congress." His audible (if you are within five miles) opinion of junketing Congressmen who roam the world with families and secretaries, dipping freely into counterpart funds, with no legal obligation to turn in expense accounts to justify their free-wheeling expenditures of his (Dad's) money, is not calculated to increase Junior's reverence for our lawmakers and their laws.

Thus, Prohibition, which made father a Scofflaw, plus confiscatory tax laws politically administered, plus the spectacle of lawmakers who perform the difficult feat of traveling thousands of miles with their hands in our pockets, plus a very evident lack of elementary morality among elected and appointed leaders, totals up to a Dickensian agreement that "the law is a ass; a idiot." This estimate is eagerly grasped by the young, and used as an excuse for a lot of things.

Oddly enough, it appears to me that it is *not* the unthinking type of parent, who raises his progeny within what seems to him to be a strict code of behavior, while at the same time betraying his own ingrained disbelief in Justice and her handmaidens, who is at fault. Sadly enough, it is the *thinking* parents, the ones who read, digest, discuss, and debate political morality, what there is of it, with friends and neighbors, within the hearing of their bat-eared young.

It's no wonder youth is confused, doubtful and defiant!

I now offer my home-knitted solution, for this situation.

As long as it stems, as I believe it does, from an inherited disrespect for law and order the logical corrective would appear to be the installation of such respect, starting in the kindergarten of today's children. PLUS a determination among all law enforcement agencies to *deserve* such respect and to police themselves accordingly. PLUS a recognition by parents of the fact that cynical and contemptuous attitudes are catching.

It would be a big, long-range program, but if from the earliest school grades, there is a co-ordinated effort made to inculcate a knowledge of and an understanding of law enforcement, from the derided local precinct station up to the respected FBI, and a revelation that all cops are not slob, all officials are not thieves and laws are made to live with, we might have a better start with tomorrow's crop of juveniles.

What's the next problem?